The Impact of Learning Styles in Teaching English

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Abstract: Learning style is one of the main factors that determines how students learn English and has a significant influence on students' learning strategy selection, which further affects their learning outcomes.

Keywords: Learning style; Teaching styles, altering teaching style.

During the past twenty years, a global movement is started among researchers and policy makers to study the effective factors in making the educational system efficient (Teddlie &Reynolds, 2000). The concept of professional promotion of teachers has emerged since the mid-twentieth century –i.e. when the implementing reforms in educational systems became necessary. The research findings and comparisons between educational systems had played a great role in the advent of this concept since the research indicate that "teacher" has a mutual role in implementing educational reforms. In one hand, the "teacher" is the subject of educational reforms and on the other hand he/she is the cause of educational reforms.

Teaching styles (which often reflect teachers' views on teaching and learning and their preferred behaviour) have also received a considerable degree of attention within the educational literature over the past two decades. There is some evidence that teaching styles can help to interpret the influences of teachers on student achievement (Aitkin & Zuzovsky, 1994; Ebmeier & Good, 1979). Teachers who continually review their perceptions and their supporting basics increase their ability to communicate properly with wide variety of students. (Capra, 1996). The key tomaintaining good discipline is to establish a good relationship with pupils based on mutual respect and rapport (Cooper and McIntyre, 1996; Morgan and Morris, 1999; Pollard et al, 2000). This involves us showing respect for our pupils, by treating them in a polite and courteous manner, and not resorting to making unfair and hurtful comments based on sarcasm or belittling the pupil. The teacher also, however, needs to be able to command authority. However, this authority should not be based on pupils' fear of the teacher's 'nastier' side. Rather, it should come from the feeling of trust and respect that the pupils have in the manner in which the teacher characteristically exercises their teacher role. In this study, teaching styles is defined based on 4 components including creation, continuity, effectiveness and evaluation and is divided into two styles: teacher-centered style (direct) and learner-based (indirect).

Teachers who are sympathetic, supportive and intimate and lead without strictness cause an increase in cognitional and emotional success among students. Teachers who are unreliable, dissatisfied and advisor lead to less cognitional and emotional success (Wubbless,Brekelmans &Hooymayers,1991) Marcel,1954 and Burton1952 reported that learners have more progress in individual and social learning in permissive environments. So that they have defended democratic organization of class rather than authoritarian organization regarding the nature of desired tasks or the relationship between teacher and students. When teachers have positive relationships with their students, it affects the student's behaviour in relation to school. Students who perceive their teachers as highly supportive have better attendance and avoid problem behaviour. (Rosenfeld, Richman, & Bowen, 2000). Sawatzki (1993) noted that not only teachers are responsible for mental and cognitional progress but also they must be careful about their

moral, social and emotional progress and pay attention to the emotional efficiency of education. According to performed studies about the relationship of teacher – student and teacher teaching style, the main purpose of this research is to examine the effect of teaching style on students' adaptation in three emotional, educational and social domains. Adjustment behaviors in the learning environment decrease the anxiety and tension of students and improve learning. The purpose of emotional adjustment is to identify the feelings and positive and negative emotions in self and having control on negative feelings related to self and others. Educational adjustment is defined as adaptation with school environment, teachers, classmates, training materials and lesson content and also having interest to education and attention to the lesson. Social adjustment refers to having some characteristics such as communication with classmates and friends, proper communication with teachers, participation in collective .works and group activities and having social skills

Altering teaching style to create teacher-student style matching. The prospect of altering language instruction to somehow accommodate different learning styles might seem forbidding to teachers. This reaction is understandable, Teaching styles are made up of methods and approaches with which teachers feel most comfortable; if they try to change to completely different approaches, they would be forced to work entirely with unfamiliar, awkward, and uncomfortable methods. Fortunately, teachers who wish to address a wide variety of learning styles need not make drastic changes in their instructional approach, Regular use of some of the instructional techniques given below should suffice to cover some specified learning style categories. 1) Make liberal use of visuals. Use photographs, drawings, sketches, and cartoons to illustrate and reinforce the meanings of vocabulary words. Show films, videotapes, and live dramatizations to illustrate lessons in text. 2) Assign some repetitive drill exercises to provide practice in basic vocabulary and grammar, but don't overdo it. 3) Do not fill every minute of class time lecturing and writing on the blackboard. Provide intervals for students to think about what they have been told; assign brief writing exercises. 4) Provide explicit instruction in syntax and semantics to facilitate formal language learning and develop skill in written communication and interpretation. 3.3 Fostering guided style-stretching Learning style is a consistent way of functioning which reflects cultural behavior patterns and, like other behaviors influenced by cultural experiences, may be revised as a result of training or changes in learning experiences. The following are examples of teaching activities that guide students to alter their learning behaviors, stretch their learning styles and enable them to improve their language performance. 1) Groups of four or five learners are given cards, each with a word on it. Each person describes his word in the foreign language to the others in the group without actually using it. When all students have described their words successfully, the students take the first letter of each and see what new word the letters spell out. (Puzzle parts might also depict objects in a room; in this case, when all the words have been guessed, the group decides which room of the house has been described.) 2) Class members are placed in pairs or in larger groups. Each student has a blank piece of paper. He listens to his partner or the group leader who has a picture to describe (the teacher can provide the picture or students can choose their own). As his partner describes the picture, the student tries to draw a rough duplicate according to the description he hears. 3.4 Providing activities with different grouping In a class made up of students with various learning styles and strategies, it is always helpful for the teacher to divide the students into groups by learning styles and give them activities based on their learning styles. This should appeal to them because they will enjoy them and be successful. For example, the group made up of the extroverted may need to express some ideas orally in the presence of one or many class members. On the other hand, the group made up the introverted may need some encouragement to share aloud and may want the safety of jotting down a few notes first and perhaps sharing with one other person before being invited or expected to participate in a group discussion. No matter how students are to be grouped, teachers should make a conscious effort to include various learning styles in daily lesson plan. One simple way to do this is to code the lesson plans so that a quick look at the completed plan shows if different learning styles have been included. Putting "A" or "V" beside activities that denote whether they are primarily appealing to the analytic

learner or the visual learner will serve as a reminder that there is a need for mixture of both kind of activities. Meanwhile, simply designating various parts of the lesson plan with letters (I for individual, P for pair, SC for small group, LG for large group) and other symbols reminds the teacher to pay attention to learning styles. If the coding system is used on a regular basis, it becomes very natural to think in terms of providing the setting and the activities by which all learners can find some portion of the class that particularly appeals to them. 3.5 Consideration of college English learners An overwhelming majority of college students are adults, and they have their own characteristics. Adult learners are self-directed and independent, and they are able to draw on a reservoir of accumulated experience as a rich resource in learning, are aware of their learning needs and want to apply skills and knowledge to real-life problems and tasks. Their previous learning experience does have impact on their learning styles. Students usually make contrasts and comparisons between their former English teachers' teaching practice and the new one's. Even if the new one's teaching is more reasonable and appealing, their former teacher's teaching impact still lasts. In China, college students have no or little real-life experience, therefore, they don't have a clear picture of their needs required by their future career. English teachers are expected to inform their students of what to learn and the language requirements by the society. 3.6 Teaching techniques involved in learning styles traditionally, the teaching of EFL in China is dominated by a teacher-centered, book-centered, grammar-translation method and an emphasis on mechanical memory. These traditional language teaching approaches have resulted in a number of typical learning styles, with visual learning being one of them. A teacher must design her lesson plan around her students. After you know the students learning styles, you should set goals for your teaching strategies. This requires you to differentiate instruction through use of the learning styles. Ideally you want to incorporate all of the learning styles so that each student may learn in a way that suits them best for the day. Studies show that matching teaching styles to learning styles can significantly enhance academic achievements, student attitude and student behavior at the college level. This is not to say that the best thing one can do for one's students is to use their preferred modes of instructions exclusively. A point no educational psychologist would dispute is that students learn more when information is presented in a variety of modes than when only a single mode is used. The point is supported by a research study carried out several decades ago, which concluded that students retain 10% of what they read, 26% of what they hear, 30% of what they see, 50% of what they see and hear, 70% of what they say and 90% of what they say as they do something (Stice,1987). The following are some techniques employed in my teaching practice: 1) Provide a balance of concrete information (data, facts, experiments and results) and abstract concepts (principles, theories). 2) Balance material that emphasizes practical problem-solving methods with material that emphasizes fundamental understanding. 3) Use pictures, graphs and simple sketches liberally, during and after the presentation of verbal material. Show films or provide demonstrations, if possible. iv. Don't fill every minute of class time lecturing and writing on the blackboard. Set aside intervals—however brief—for students to learn what have been told on their own. Raise questions and problems to be worked on by students in a small group, 5) Talk to students about learning styles, both in advising and in class. Students are reassured to find their academic difficulties may not all be due to personal inadequacies. Explaining to students how they learn most efficiently may be an important step in helping them reshape their learning experiences so that they can be successful. 6) Try to design some activities which involve students, senses as many as possible, using all the senses to help improve English learning. For example, relatively long passage dictations, and games, which require students to write down what they are told by their classmates, who already have learnt that by heart. 7) Encourage students to learn English online, such as, post writing assignments through e-mail, read materials given online (the students in the experimental class use the new horizon college English book, a web-assisted textbook). 8) Motivate learning. As much as possible, teach new material in the context of situation to which students can relate in terms of their personal experiences, rather than simply as more material to memorize. Teachers confronted with this list of techniques might feel that is impossible to do all that in the English.

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